

THE HOMES OF THE LEPCHAS

favour and the people will not prosper and may suffer from sore eyes. It is not necessary that everyone should visit the lake in person; gifts can be given by proxy by another member of the same *ptso*. 79 778 753 782 614

There is another lake, *Luksom partam*, high up in Zongu, from whence birth is meant to have originated. Sterile couples who wish for children should visit this lake, spend the night on its bank copulating, and then in the morning throw into the waters a silver rupee and a *chimi* (altar light) to please the gods. If necessary this may be repeated annually for three years. The old widow, a nun, who told me about this had performed the complete rite with her husband, but unsuccessfully. 842 823

The connection between water and birth runs all through the Mun mythology. In the divine world where the two gods Tak-bo-thing and Narzong-nyou live there is a stream called Lungfung which represents the birth of male children, and a well called Rung-zel *oong-lap* which represents the birth of female children. This well is guarded by a supernatural boy called Sathim *ong*, and on occasion a family which has many girls and no boys will get a Mun to make sacrifices to the boy and the two gods to make the two pieces of water change place. 823 773

It will be noted that even in the case of these sacred lakes an explicit distinction is made between the lakes themselves and the supernaturals who inhabit them.

Devils have been occasionally seen by some people, sometimes looking like fierce animals, sometimes more or less like human beings (though generally covered with hair), sometimes as misty and gigantic shapes. They are far more frequently heard, whistling and crying, sometimes wailing like a banshee; and the god of hunters, Pong *rum*, persecutes those who displease him with poltergeist-like performances, throwing stones at the people or their houses and so on. To see or hear a devil is alarming, but not excessively so; there is nothing to be done except to run away or to turn aside one's eyes; though some bold people throw stones at devils and shoo them away as though they were marauding dogs. In the case of poltergeist performances the sufferer will burn incense, or perhaps just smoke a cigarette at the devil. To guard against the accidental meeting of devils the lamas prepare amulets, composed of charms written on paper and sewn into a piece of cloth which is worn on the dress; and Mun give the specially prepared roots of *s'lek* (a dioecious plant which grows above the snow level) to be rubbed over the body. 776 [75] 824

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girl's parents with Rs. 15 and a pig as 'soup money'; these gifts represent the price of the soup given as special food to nursing mothers. Should he want the child and not its mother he must pay for both the *thip-song* and the 'soup money'. If the father is unknown or refuses to acknowledge his responsibility the girl's family performs the ceremony; at the end of the ceremony a tree is designated as the child's father; a wooden phallus is stuck into the trunk and it is then spat on and otherwise insulted by all present. The tree is meant to wither after the child's birth. 848

It is a very great disgrace for a girl to produce a bastard, and it is believed that possibly some girls somewhere bear their bastards in field-houses or the forest and kill them rather than confess to the act. I could get no concrete instances of this and the idea of infanticide is so appalling to Lepchas that they will not even willingly entertain the idea of its being practised by strangers. There is no known method of avoiding conception and the only abortifacient believed in, and that very half-heartedly, is the bathing in hot sulphurous streams which are found some distance away in Zongu. 847 848 [842]

When a bastard is born there is no gathering of friends and relations for the birth feast on the third day and a lama will not come to the house to cast the child's horoscope; instead either the child's or the girl's father must visit him. Apart from this the child is treated normally. Should the girl marry later the child will stay with its maternal grandparents and will be brought up as their child; it will be considered as a member of their *ptso*, and, if a boy, will have the same share in the heritable property as his maternal uncles. Although bearing a bastard is an act of the greatest shame, once it is over and done with no attempt is made to hide the matter or to hush it up. People will announce quite openly that they or their relations are bastards, or have born or begotten bastards; the shame situation has been successfully passed and is therefore no longer a cause for unpleasant feelings. Bastards are believed to suffer from one of three inherent weaknesses; either their mothers will die young, or their health will be bad, or they will suffer from goitre (three of the six supposed bastards of Lingthem have this complaint). Goitres are of two sorts; one of them is extremely lucky and productive of wealth and prosperity;¹⁵ 848 777 [753]

¹⁵ The seven men of Mayel (see Chapter Nine) who are the patrons of grain harvests are all said to have enormous goitres and as people sow the grain they murmur in prayer to them 'Ta-yoot thimbu : sambo thimbu'—'May we have big goitres; may we have big harvests.'

848 the other is the *tantoom* of bastardy. It is possible to diagnose
 752 bastardy goitres because these will ache in the presence of corpses
 or in the houses where bastards have been born.

There are six reputed bastards in Lingthem, but only two of these were born from unmarried mothers, and for only one of them, the old mother of Pargeut, did the father perform *thip-song*. The first Dorjé Lapoon is said to be the son of a travelling Sikkimese; he was born during his father's prolonged absence. Lumba *chith-embu* is believed to be the bastard of a lama of Talung on the ground that they look exactly like one another, and Dunbi, for the same reason, is said to be the son of his father's 'younger brother'. In the face of strong physical resemblance with a possible father, it is generally believed that this man, rather than the husband, was the begetter. Nahyeun is generally believed to be Dunbi's bastard; he was born of an unmarried girl when his father was already married. Little Seryop Katoo who was born when his mother's husband was twelve has already been mentioned; his begetter is said to be Jiroong's elder brother. In her time Kurma's mother bore two bastards, one before her marriage, and one when she was a widow. There are cases in which a man believes himself to be the father of another man's child; but these suspicions are always kept very quiet.

832 The production of a bastard is no draw-back on the girl's
 842 subsequent marriage; on the contrary, the fact that she has shown
 herself fertile makes her if anything more desirable. The Lepchas have a great and justifiable fear of sterility; they do not on the other hand manifest or express any fear of impotence, and no aphrodisiacs are employed. One or two extremely peculiar and incongruous ones are known of, for they are hawked about in Gangtok and other towns where there is a ready market for them among the Hindus, and, somewhat less, among the Nepali. For the Lepchas these are extremely funny; they cannot conceive of the loss of potency, any more than the loss of appetite, except through illness or old age.

842 There is an altogether surprising amount of sterility among the Lepcha women of Zongu.¹⁶ Of the fifty-six married women over twenty, eighteen were completely sterile and one had only produced a still-born daughter. Of these seven had reached or passed the menopause without producing any children; four are between

¹⁶ For the complete fertility tables of the women of Lingthem, and also for complete life tables see Appendix I, a.

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the ages of fifty and thirty; the remaining seven are between twenty and thirty and for them there is still some chance of producing a child, for though copulation normally starts at or before puberty the average age for bearing the first child (worked out from the women of Lingthem) is over twenty-two; there are only three instances of a woman bearing a child before she was twenty. Most exceptionally for a primitive community it was possible in Zongu to get the exact age of every individual for the following reason. It is absolutely essential for participation in all lamaist ceremonies for every Lepcha to know in which year of the twelve-year 'animal' cycle¹⁷ they were born, for this affects birth and marriage, the diagnosis of disease, the suitability or otherwise of individual exorcists, and many other occasions in ordinary life. Also after he has completed his third (or exceptionally his fourth) cycle—that is to say when he is 36 or 48—it is obligatory for a Lepcha to make prophetic consultation as to the hazards and misfortunes which await him in the next twelve years. Although no Lepcha can state his age in years, everybody knows their 'animal' year, and with few exceptions, which can be checked by cross-reference, the number of cycles they have completed.

I have not been able to make up my mind as to the reason for the great sterility of the Lepchas. It would seem as though it were the women rather than the men who were sterile, for in the greater number of cases of a man remarrying on account of his first wife's sterility the second wife has borne him children. A suggestion put forward by some Lepchas with whom I discussed the matter, though others considered it absolutely ludicrous, is that sterility may be due to premature copulation. The Lepchas do not recognise and have no word for physical puberty, and most of them believe that the signs of female puberty (swelling of the breasts and beginning of menses) are the result of copulation and that therefore girls have to be copulated with in order that they may develop. A number of people admitted (if they were women) copulating with men when they were only ten or eleven, or (if they were men) more or less raping young girls. A number of the sterile women however emphatically deny such premature experience, and I have no reason to suppose they were lying; and anyhow on the medical evidence it seems doubtful whether such premature experience would cause subsequent sterility, though it might render childbirth more difficult.

¹⁷ This will be more fully explained in the next chapter; see also Appendix III.

164 Another possible cause might be the epidemics of some sort of
● 842 genito-urinary disease which occasionally breaks out. The Lepchas
731 call this disease *tanji*, which is the term used by mission-trained
dispensers for gonorrhœa; although some of the symptoms,
notably great pain in micturition, a discharge of pus, and occasion-
ally orchitis, are similar, it seems to me more than doubtful if the
diagnosis is correct. For one thing the disease comes in epidemics,
and seems to attack people indiscriminately, old people and infants
as well as adults; on one occasion it is said that the animals also
suffered. Again trustworthy people have told me that though they
or their spouse had the disease, and though they continued marital
copulation, the other spouse was not affected. The discharge lasts
for about three weeks, and then clears up automatically, without,
as far as is known, leaving any after-effects, nor necessarily recur-
ring. The final argument against its being gonorrhœa is that there
was not a single blind baby in the neighbourhood. Whatever the
disease may be, it does not inevitably cause sterility for some
of the parents of the larger and still growing families had suffered
from it. It is possible however that it is a complicating cause.
Unlike their neighbours the Nepali, the Lepchas of Zongu do not
suffer much from mumps.

842 Since their principal food is grain in one form or another it
seems to me that the question of vitamin-E deficiency can be
excluded. I think it is worth considering the suggestion that the
sterility and very low fertility are due to genetic factors. The
Lepchas are a 'pure' race within the meaning of the act, for at
any rate in Zongu intermarriage is excessively rare; in Lingthem
besides the two supposed bastards there was only one other person
not of pure Lepcha blood, and that is Mrs. Tinkep who is three-
quarters Sikkimese. Despite their stringent exogamic laws the
Lepchas are a relatively inbred community, and if, as seems possible,
fertility is genetically determined, it may be that the low reproduc-
tion rate of the Lepchas is a genetic characteristic.

163 Compared with any of the neighbouring tribes the fertility of
165 those Lepchas who have children is extremely low. Of the thirty-
seven women in Zongu who have children still living, only one
has produced seven and two six; the average is just over two per
fertile woman. Infantile mortality is naturally high, but not,
according to the figures I could get, excessively high; most mothers
of families seem to have lost one child, but only in three cases have
all or most of the children died young. It is possible however that

527 fields. When feasts go on into the night, and especially at marriage feasts, couples may go away into the forest or to a neighbouring shed; this depends entirely on individual wish and opportunity, and sexual activity is not a necessary or even a particularly common concomitant to a feast; on the other hand sexual conversation and [522] jokes are inevitable and continuous, and in some of the longer feasts practical jokes with a sexual tinge are played: young women set on an old man, strip him naked and chase him round the monastery, and so on; it is nearly always the older men who are made the butts of such pleasantries.

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522 One of the things which most surprised me about the Lepchas
831 was this constant verbal preoccupation with sex. Whenever a group of men and women were gathered together for any purpose, however solemn or important, every possible remark was given sexual significance. On the whole when there were only members of one sex present, except sometimes among the younger men, or when there were only three or four people present, the conversation was not so indecent, but in mixed groups it was practically continuously so, and each sally was greeted with as hearty laughter as if an entirely novel joke had been made. A certain amount of ingenuity was shown in giving apparently ordinary phrases a sexual meaning (almost any transitive verb could be twisted into a periphrasis for copulation) but apart from this the theme was not embroidered in any way; simply every possible opportunity was seized for mentioning the primary sexual characteristics and copulation.

522 It is difficult, especially with the English taboos on the anglo-
831 saxon monosyllables, to give any illustrations of these jokes. But
642 the following verbal transcription of an extremely solemn occasion may give some idea of the sort of pleasantries which are the constant accompaniment to Lepcha work and feasts. As has already been described³ Chala Mandal went to a great deal of expense and trouble [755] to summon from a distant village an old and widely-famed Mun in order to appease the spirit of his first dead wife, so that his lumbago might be cured and he might beget a son. This occasion was for the Mandal, for his two wives, and for the dozen or more other people present one of very great importance. This is the conversation which took place when the Mun was already in the position

³ See Chapter Eight, p. 231.

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where he was going to pray: the table with the cup filled with strained *chi* and the incense burner already lit was in front of him; the Mandal was seated beside him, with his wives opposite; everything was ready for the ceremony to begin. Before praying the Mun made an, as it were, introductory speech, addressed partly to the Mandal, and partly to the other people present. 522
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The Mun: I'm a very old man, and I found the journey very trying indeed; I was tired and felt I'd like to rest, and — a girl. I'm really a very old man now; but since you're the Mandal, and this is your house I shall do what I can. When you first sent a messenger with a load of *chi* I said 'No, I cannot go'. But you sent twice and three times and I couldn't resist you. It is true that in rank as Mandal you are above me; but in age you could be my grandson. Just as a small girl is frightened when she sees a big penis and runs away, or as a little boy is frightened when he sees a big vulva, so am I frightened of you. Nevertheless I shall do what I can. I am very sorry for you because although you have had four wives you have got no son. I think this is a source of great worry to you, but what can be done? It is not your fault; you have treated your wives well. It is not a bad deed but misfortune which makes you childless. Were I to say I could do nothing for you, you would be disappointed; shall I do this ceremony and nothing result I shall be ashamed. Nevertheless I will do what I can. You—his wives—you are my sisters and daughters: tell me, my daughters, does this husband of yours treat you badly?

The Mandal: My parents-in-law are very strict with me, and were I to do so they would punish me.

Tafoor: And then you'd take it out of your wives—or put it in—very roughly. (General laughter)

The Mandal (while the Mun smears butter on the cup): When I was ill it was discovered that Sabdok *moong* was troubling me, and Hit *rum* was angry, so I sent for you, because you are an old and experienced man. So please be so kind as to sacrifice properly, so that I may be troubled no longer. Please do so, whether my body is cured thereby or not.

The Mun: Were you to die, what would happen to your wives and daughter—women who are all alone?

The Mandal: Don't worry about that; in that case they can go home.

The Mun: I have already said that I am old and weak; if my sacrifice is unsuccessful, don't blame me. I take all you here to

522 witness what I have said. (To Ashyok who had fetched him):
 831 If I fail in this I'll never dare look at you again. The Mun then
 842 began to pray in a loud and clear voice, and the rest listened quietly
 [781] and almost reverently—an unparalleled situation in my experience
 of Lepchas. The Mun first mentioned the Mandal's year of birth
 and *ptso* and then summoned Sabdok *moong* and Hit *rum* to deliver
 him, and then called on the gods collectively to give the Mandal
 a son. 'Why is it,' he asked the gods, 'when he has two wives,
 and there are lots of other girls going about with gaping vulvas,
 that he has no son?' (*General laughter*) He then sprinkled the
chi and said to the supernaturals 'Now I am only doing this small
 ceremony; when I return to my own home the day after to-morrow
 I shall repeat the ceremony better.' He then announced in his
 normal voice that he had done all he could and called on Gongyop
 to take over from him and finish the ceremony.

This ceremony was, I repeat, the most solemn that I witnessed
 in Lingthem, and the sexual jokes were therefore comparatively
 rare; also there were no direct invitations or solicitations, such as
 would occur in more convivial circumstances.

184 I found this continual harping on the humorous aspects of
 522 sexual physiology puzzling, since most Lepchas have a full and
 831 adequate sex life, and face sex extremely simply, without
 guilt or secrecy; but the town Lepchas found it extremely
 shocking, for the Lepchas of Zongu would make such remarks
 before their parents or children; a man would not direct such
 remarks to his mother-in-law or daughter-in-law, or *vice versa*,
 but he is not very careful as to whether these people are in ear-shot
 or not. On the grounds of this openness of speech the town Lepchas
 called the Lepchas of Zongu uncivilised and shameless. I think it
 is legitimate to call such remarks obscene, since they are avoided
 in front of relations-in-law and would cause shame if for example
 they were uttered by a third person in the presence of a son-in-law
 and mother-in-law, and since the three operative words are always
 referred to in circumlocutions before a superior. They are certainly
 relished as obscenities.

522 I think one of the reasons for this constant verbal preoccupation
 831 with the comic aspects of sex is the fact that at any village gathering
 or feast the great majority of the people present are, owing to the
 stringent incest laws, forbidden sexual partners; there is a release
 from tension in thus jesting about these dangerous subjects, although
 even in jest direct invitations are not made to people who

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

- 842 According to Lepcha theory a child's life starts at the moment of
 843 conception. When the two secretions mingle¹ the soul arrives
 from heaven or the place of the gods (the first being the lamaist, the
 second the Mun, repository of unborn people); the father's semen
 provides the bones and brain, the mother's vaginal secretions the
 843 flesh and blood. The first portion of the foetus to be formed is the
 eyes, which are completed at the end of the first month; then from
 round the eyes the head develops and then the rest of the body
 downwards. The foetus is completely human with all its organs,
 and even its hair, at the end of the fifth month.

Within the womb is something resembling a nipple through
 which the child draws nourishment; this nourishment is something
 like butter, and is the transmuted food of the mother, just as milk
 is after birth. Consequently the mother is not permanently depleted
 by child-bearing; none of her body has gone to feed the child.

- 842 Conception is shown by the cessation of the menses, which were
 instituted for that purpose. The child does not feed on the menstrual
 blood; menstruation is exclusively a calendar.

- 843 At the fifth month when the baby is considered fully formed the
 expectant parents must start observing the numerous pre-natal
 precautions which have to be followed if the child is not to be born
 malformed, or if the mother is not to have a difficult delivery.
 The entering into this period of pre-natal precautions is established
 by a Mun *pék-ing* both parents with a bunch of elephant grass in
 one hand and a live fowl in the other. Both parents are equally
 capable of influencing the child within the womb, and in point of
 fact the greater number of the precautions to be observed are
 concerned with work which is liable to fall to a man rather than a
 843 woman. Copulation after conception has no influence on the foetus,
 833 except incestuously, which would produce a miscarriage, and may

[831] ¹ The Lepchas consider semen and the vaginal secretions to be parallel
 substances; they are called penis-water and vagina-water.

846 of birth. The mother is also washed on the third day and should be dressed in a new cloth, or if the family is especially poor, in a properly cleaned and good one. After this the mother is washed every three days for a month. The baby is washed in luke-warm water morning and evening. For the third-day feast the mother sits in a corner of the kitchen with the baby wrapped in a piece of white cloth on her lap.

The first person to arrive at the house must be a Mun ; if a Mun has been employed to assist in delivery the same one must officiate at the birth feast. A chicken is killed and boiled and cut in half and placed on a *lafet* with other offerings. When the *lafet* is ready the guests arrive. If the child is a first child or a first son many people come ; but for subsequent children, especially if a good number have been born, only perfunctory ceremonial visits are paid. If the child is a boy each guest will bring a scarf and Rs. 1, if a girl Rs. -/6.³ Nearer relations of the parents may also bring presents of chickens or eggs or rice for the mother ; the money will be spent on things for the child. After the presents are given, the Mun offers the sacrifice with a prayer to the Birth god (*gek rum*) ; he then waves an incense burner over all who are present, starting with the parents. Then the offerings on the *lafet* are eaten by all except the Mun. It is believed that the baby will only start to sleep properly after the ceremony has been performed.

For a male child an ox, or, failing that a pig or a goat, is killed for the feast ; for a girl no animal is killed but bought meat is often added to the vegetables and rice provided for the guests. Only 842 on one occasion is an ox killed for a girl ; if the parents very much desire that the next child shall be a boy, and have the means, they dedicate an ox to Narzong-nyou, after which the Mun goes into deep meditation at his home to persuade the goddess to make the next child a son. During the feast every guest is given three *patyoot* of the special ' lying-in ' *chi* and as much strained rice *chi* as they can drink. There are no formalities in the presentation of a new-born child to its relations and neighbours and no fixed remarks or attitudes. It is bad mannered to speak ill of a child but its resemblance to relations may be commented on. There are no pre-conceived theories of resemblance of siblings to each other or to their parents ; but if a child looks strikingly like a man who is not

³ No equivalents in kind were told to me for these cash presents, which suggests that the discrimination in favour of male children is of very recent origin.

833 potent; trustworthy people said that when they were first married they would copulate with their wives five or six, and even eight or nine times in the course of the night, though they would then be tired the next day. I have got no comparable information from women but such statements were often made in mixed company without the women present making any comment or in any way expressing incredulity. This potency diminishes around the age of thirty, but copulation once nightly is still the general rule for married couples. Tafoor claimed that in his youth he was almost indefatigable, but says that now he only sleeps with his wife once every three or four nights; this is the reason why he is relatively fat, for chastity induces fatness. It is believed that people accustomed to regular copulation will feel extremely uncomfortable for the first few days if for any reason their partner is removed; but it is considered that people over thirty should be able to support long periods of chastity (with the exception, some laymen say, of the lamas, who cannot do without sex even for a week).

The normal position for Lepchas copulating is for the woman to lie absolutely prone and relaxed, while the man kneels in front of her between her legs. In situations where discretion is necessary both parties lie on their sides, copulation taking place *a retro*; and in some sudden and quick encounters both parties remain standing, the woman leaning against a tree or wall. During copulation the woman lies completely motionless and relaxed, but this passivity is not equated with non-participation, and the orgasms of both sexes are considered identical in nature. The Lepcha attitude to semen is practically the same as that commonly held in Europe; it is thought to be a secretion which is constantly produced and stored against use, so that a husband who has been for some while separated from his wife will have particularly large reserves. The testicles are regarded as the reservoirs of semen; they are not paid much attention to in conversation and have little rôle in the constant flow of sexual jokes. It is believed that if a man's testicles hang lower than his penis he is more likely to be fertile than if the contrary is the case. Semen is considered to be a rather unpleasant and soiling substance, and these characteristics are advanced as one of the major reasons against masturbation. Lepcha men consider that copulation is most enjoyable either with a very young girl or with a woman who has borne more than one child; in the latter case there is the added advantage that copulation is thought to be much less exhausting. Men with large penises are considered to give

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Men with large penises are considered to give
 women more immediate satisfaction, but to be on the whole less fertile; there are, however, some anecdotes told of mothers procuring large-penised lovers to impregnate their daughters when their husbands have been unable to do so. The size and shape of the genitals of the men in the neighbourhood is a common subject for conversation; and such exact anatomical details are known and described that it would seem as though the privacy and secrecy enjoyed after the fire is damped down were by no means absolute.

A couple of Tibetan prostitutes live at Mangan on the other side of the Teesta River to cater for the transitory Tibetan muleteers. A couple of the Lepchas of Lingthem have made use of their services for the fee of one rupee. Kurma said he preferred these women because, in contrast to Lepcha women, they were energetic during the act. The hiring of these women constitutes a display of superfluous wealth and an act of dare-devilry; the Lepchas consider their presence as one of the comic curiosities of the neighbourhood, but think it rather absurd for anybody to pay for sexual intercourse.

It is considered by most Lepchas extremely dangerous to sleep with a menstruating woman; Chala Mandal said that he personally would not be afraid, but the general belief is that the man who does so will be unwell and doltish afterwards for a period that some men put at a week and others at three years. It is a general belief that women are particularly desirous directly after menstruation and a few consider that impregnation is most likely to take place at that time. Old Hlatam the 'poisoner' has even gone so far as to warn her daughters to be particularly careful of that period so as to avoid bastards; but this belief is by no means generally held, and it would seem to be an importation from the Nepali, who, Major Morris says, have turned this belief into a cultural act of faith. During their actual periods girls will tell their lovers that they are unwell, but the great majority pay no attention to the subsequent days. There is also a vague belief that it is possible to foretell conception if the man is especially tired and the woman especially passionate.

Although sexual enjoyment is believed to continue for both sexes up to an advanced old age, the sexual activities of old people are considered rather ludicrous. One of Chudo's most successful and appreciated jokes was his vivid description of the noises he heard nightly coming from the sleeping place of his sixty-nine-year-old 'grandfather' the second Dorjé Lapoon and his seventy-four-year-old bride Pumri; and the first Dorjé Lapoon's attempts at eighty-

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APPENDIX I

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TABLE III

FECUNDITY OF MARRIED WOMEN

The Lepchas are mainly exogamous: that is to say by far the greater number of women in the community have come in from outside, and by far the greater number of girls will marry into other villages. In the second column the following signs are used:

L—from Lingthem or the other smaller villages under Chala Mandal.

Z—from Zongu, the Lepcha reserve in which Lingthem is situated.

Taking the average number of inhabitants per household in Lingthem—5.3—as valid for the whole area, the total population of Zongu is about 2000.

X—Lepcha from outside Zongu.

XX—Partly Sikkimese.

The question marks in this column indicate that I could not discover if the women were born inside or outside Zongu. None of the women so marked are from Lingthem, nor have any admixture of foreign blood.

It is probable that the number of children who have died in infancy is an understatement, as the Lepchas attach little emotional importance to children dying very young and may forget about them. Of the sterile women under sixty, I am certain, however, that they have never borne a child alive or dead.

ab. in columns 5 and 6 stands for a still-born child.

P. in column 7 means that the woman was pregnant in April 1937.

Date of birth	Place of origin	Live children		Dead children		Age at birth of first child
		M	F	M	F	
1852	?	1	1	1	?	?
1858	L	1	?	?	?	?
1863	?	2	4	1	1	?
1864	?	?	?	?	?	?
1866	?	1	?	?	?	?
1870	Z	1	—	1	—	?30
1871	Z	—	—	—	—	—
1871	L	—	—	—	—	—
1873	L	—	1	2	—	?
1875	Z	2	1	1	—	?
1875	?	—	—	—	—	—
1877	X	—	—	1	1	?
1877	X	—	—	—	—	?
1881	Z	—	3	1	—	?
1883	Z	2	3	1	—	19
1884	X	—	—	2	—	?
1885	Z	2	3	—	—	?
1887	Z	3	1	—	—	24

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842	Date of birth	Place of origin	Live children		Dead children		Age at birth of first child
			M	F	M	F	
	1888	Z	3	2	-	-	20
	1889	?	-	-	2	2	?
	1890	L	-	-	-	-	-
	1891	L	-	-	-	-	-
	1891	X	-	-	-	-	-
	1891	?	-	-	-	2	?20
	1892	L	-	-	-	-	-
	1893	L	-	3	3	3	22
	1894	X	-	-	-	-	-
	1896	X	1	-	sb	-	23
	1896	Z	-	-	-	sb	-
	1896	?	2	-	?2	?3	?25
	1897	?	-	-	-	-	-
	1899	Z	1	4	-	-	22
	1899	L	2	1	1	-	20
	1900	L	-	-	-	-	-
	1900	Z	1	2	sb	-	23P
	1901	Z	-	2	1	1	?25
	1902	Z	-	-	-	-	-
	1905	Z	2	1	-	-	19
	1906	Z	1	-	?	?	?29
	1906	L	1	3	-	-	17
	1906	Z	-	-	-	-	-
	1908	Z	1	2	-	sb	22
	1909	Z	-	-	-	-	-
	1909	X	-	-	-	-	-
	1909	Z	-	3	-	-	22
	1909	X	-	2	1	-	21
	1909	Z	-	-	-	-	-
	1911	Z	-	1	-	-	25
	1911	Z	-	-	-	-	-
	1911	L	-	-	-	-	?21
	1912	X	1	-	-	-	22
	1912	L	-	-	-	-	-
	1912	X	1	-	-	-	20
	1912	XX	1	-	-	-	22
	1914	Z	1	-	sb	-	20P
	1914	Z	-	-	-	-	-
	1915	Z	(widow—unknown recently arrived)				
	1918	L	-	-	-	-	-
	1919	Z	-	-	-	-	-
	1920	Z	-	-	-	-	-

¹ This woman was subsequently successfully delivered of a boy.

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became the monastery of that name. He is also believed to¹⁷⁵ have founded shrines at Tashiding, Pemiongchi, and Sang-na-ch'o-ling; but others assert that Tashiding was first occupied by the Na-dak-pa Lama.

Lha-tsun is usually represented as seated on a leopard-skin⁵³² mat with the right leg hanging down and his body almost¹⁷⁵ bare, one of his titles being He-ru-ka-pa, which means unclad. His complexion is of a dark blue hue; but he is otherwise somewhat like his prototype, the Guru Rimpoche. A chaplet of skulls encircles his brow; and in his left hand is a skull-cup filled with blood, and a trident topped with human heads rests in front of the left shoulder. The right hand is in the traditional teaching attitude.

He is believed to be the incarnation of the great Indian teacher Bhima Mitra: and he himself is held to have been subsequently incarnated twice as a Sikkim Lama, the last reincarnation being Jigmi Pa-wo, who was born at Ok-ja-ling, near Sakya, who built the present monastery at Pemiongchi.

The place and manner of his death are apparently unknown; but he is currently reported to have died in Sikkim of fever contracted while on a visit to India. The dark livid hue of his skin is said to be due to his death from a malignant fever. His chief object in visiting India was, according to a popular saying, to obtain a rare variety of ruddy leopard-skin, such as is highly prized by Hindu ascetics as a mat.

All his clothing and personal effects are carefully treasured⁷⁷⁸ in Sikkim and worshipped as most sacred relics. They were stored at Pemiongchi monastery until the time of the Gurkha invasion in the last century, when, for greater safety, most of them were taken to the remote Talung monastery.

At Pemiongchi one complete set of his full-dress robes is kept, including hat and boots, hand-drum, bell, *dorje*, and a miraculous *purbu*, or dagger for stabbing the demons. These objects are only shown on special occasions to wealthy⁷⁷⁸ worshippers, and they are highly celebrated as a certain cure⁸⁴² for barrenness. Couples thus afflicted, and who can afford

778 the necessary expense, have a preliminary service carried
 ● 842 out in the chapel, lasting for one or two days, after which the box containing the holy relics is brought forth and ceremoniously opened. Each article is placed on the heads of the suppliants, the officiating Lama meanwhile repeating various charms and spells. Of the marvellous efficacy of this procedure many stories are told: and should two sons result, one of them is invariably dedicated to the Church.

175 Subsequent to Lha-tsun's death in the latter end of the
 794 seventeenth century, Lamaism has steadily progressed in Sikkim till latterly monks and monasteries filled the country.

[212] What civilisation and literature the Sikkimese now possess they owe entirely to Lamaism; and the Lepcha alphabet too was derived from the Tibetan.

175 The official version of the story, as given in the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, is somewhat different, and brings the history up to date. It runs as follows:

"Local tradition asserts that the ancestors of the Rajas of Sikkim originally came from the neighbourhood of Lhasa in Tibet. About the middle of the seventeenth century, the head of the family was named Puntsok Numgye; and to him repaired three Tibetan monks, professors of Nyingmapa (or 'red-cap' sect of Buddhism), who were disgusted at the predominance of the Gelukpa sect in Tibet. These Lamas succeeded in converting the Lepchas of Sikkim to their own faith, and in making Pun-tsok Raja of the country. The avatars of two of these Lamas are now the heads, respectively, of the great monasteries of Pemiongchi and Tashiding. In 1788 the Gurkhas invaded Sikkim in the governorship of the Morang or tarai, and only retired in 1789 on the Tibetan government ceding to them a piece of territory at the head of the Koti Pass. But in 1792, on a second invasion of Tibetan territory by the Gurkhas, an immense Chinese army advanced to the support of the Tibetans, defeated the Gurkhas, and dictated terms to them almost at the gates of Kathmandu."

It may be noted in passing that this account was probably

159 Gangtok, where he was employed as a scullion. He was at this time already a Lama, and after a year ran away, because he "could not bear to commit the sin of killing chickens for the Maharaja's table." While he was in

[868] Gangtok he learnt a certain amount about European cooking, for which he appears to have had some aptitude. His brother told me that when he first came back to Lingtem he complained perpetually about the dirtiness of the cooking pots at home, and used to spend all his time polishing them.

[515] This was only a passing phase, however; for now, added Tafoor, "he is just as dirty as any other normal person!"

159 Chodu has one daughter and two small sons; the elder of
 ● 842 these is only four, but already wears his yellow sash. Once, when the wives of Tafoor and Chodu were both pregnant, it was apparent that Tafoor's wife would give birth to a son and Chodu's to a daughter, since the former's child was high up in the womb. Tafoor, however, wished for a girl and Chodu wanted a boy. They talked to their wives; and found them willing for the sexes to be changed. All that was necessary was that the two women should exchange presents. This they did; and in due course each gave birth to a child of the sex desired. Chodu says that this change of sex in any unborn child can always be effected up to the fifth or sixth month: after that its sex is definitely settled and cannot be altered. When the sex of a child has been changed in this
 [828] way it is always liable to indulge in the pursuits of the opposite sex until it reaches the age of puberty; and this is held to be the cause of effeminate boys and masculine girls. Tafoor's eldest daughter should have been born a boy. Although she
 [857] is good to the other children and likes looking after the house, she is also fond of climbing trees, making bows and arrows (a most unwomanly occupation), and catapulting birds. While she was still in the womb a Lama, a man who did not like Tafoor, came to the house one day and, unknown to the latter, changed the tassel on his rosary. For this reason, the child, although really a male, was born a girl. The sex of an unborn child can only be once changed: and once

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the change has been effected nothing can be done to alter⁸⁴² it back. ●

Chodu, more than any other Lepcha I have ever met,¹⁵⁹ conformed in appearance with the popular conception of⁸³¹ these people as "Elves of the forest"; but actually his gnome-like appearance was somewhat deceptive. He was so pre-occupied with sex, more even than the average Lepcha, that we had already christened him "the dirty Reverend" before we knew his proper name; and under this title he appears in all my notes. When he found that we were fond of flowers he used often to bring in great armfuls of purple *Dendrobium*^[137] orchids, flowers that in England would have cost at least a shilling for a single bloom; and on these occasions our otherwise severely simple living-room would assume the appearance of a popular actress's dressing-room. His duties as a Ka-Ne brought him almost daily to the monastery, when he would come tiptoeing into the bedroom to change the water on the altar. A very likeable person and full of fun.^[157]

* * * * *

The *Chôteмбу*, who was otherwise known as Lumbar, was¹⁵⁹ fifty-two. Grey-haired and jolly, his rather peculiar goitre^[164] gave the impression of a roll of fat all round his neck. His origin was somewhat obscure, for he appears to have been what our interpreter described as the "blasted son" of a Tibetan. He can neither read nor write, and says he has^[212] never exercised his prerogative to beat his fellows. His first wife, now forty-seven, is a daughter of Pom-Ri, now the wife of the second Dorje Lopön. After ten years of married life¹⁵⁹ his wife, since she had borne him no child, urged him to⁵⁹⁵ marry again; this he did, and although his second wife has given him two children he still remains faithful to the first. The two women live in separate houses, but there is no question of their not getting on together. The first lives alone in a cattle-shed because she likes to get away by herself at times, and finds it irksome to be always in a house full of people and noise. *Chôteмбу* divides his time between the

853 mother must take care not to go out in the sun, nor should
 757 she sit down in any damp place. She should also give up
 eating salt and meat for the time being and it is better if
 she takes no *chi*. A diet consisting solely of rice and butter
 is considered the best at such a time.

856 There is nothing a mother can do to help her baby over
 the teething period, but it is considered better at such a time
 not to feed the child on frogs' or bears' flesh, or it will not
 talk until very late. The teeth should start to appear when
 the child is eight months old and should be complete by
 the end of the twelfth month; but if the child is seen by a
 pregnant woman its teeth will not appear until after that
 woman's child is born. For this reason pregnant women
 always take care not to look at other people's babies. The

[777] lower teeth of a boy should appear before the upper or the
 842 child's luck will not be good: moreover, if the first child is

a boy and its upper teeth appear first it means that the next
 child will be a girl. With girls the reverse applies; and in
 [787] cases where their upper teeth do not appear first it means
 that in later life they will have trouble with domestic animals,
 and are likely to lose their husbands soon after marriage.
 Nothing can be done in cases of this sort, and parents
 generally conceal the fact that their children's teeth have
 appeared in the wrong order. It is a bad sign if a child of
 either sex has pointed milk-teeth in the lower jaw: this is
 a sure sign that the child will be naughty and disobedient.

856 A child is thought to become either "naughty" or "good"
 577 at about the age of five or six; but its character is not finally
 865 formed until about fifteen, or, in the case of a girl, not until
 157 she gives birth to her first child. A "naughty" child is one
 who is unfriendly, who hits people, quarrels with its friends
 and throws stones at them; but the worst characteristic of
 "bad" children is that they will not co-operate with others.
 The domineering and strong-willed child with a mind of its
 own, which is looked upon with favour in our culture, would
 be quite out of place in Lepcha society, and would be
 definitely branded as "naughty." This is an excellent

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the following are examples: *Ka-ka*, or *Ma-ma*—Don't; *A-ji*—Take care!; *Bum*—stay there.

Mrs. de Beauvoir Stocks mentions that "deformed children are instantly killed, the mother in a case of that sort being well treated by her husband but badly by her neighbours." But my information does not in any way confirm this wild generalisation. All my informants were horrified at the suggestion that Lepchas practised any form of infanticide. "Such a thing is never done," said Tafoor, "nor have I ever heard of it. Even a monster, such as might be the result of two near relatives marrying, would not be killed. The only case of this sort of which I have ever heard was when, many generations ago, a cow in Talung gave birth to a human child. The people were very frightened and killed it after a week."

In a community which desires children above all things, and in which no stigma attaches to illegitimacy, there would appear to be no reason for indulging in infanticide, and I am convinced that in Jongu it is absolutely unknown. In fairness to Mrs. Stocks, however (whose account is admittedly compiled from odds and ends of information gathered from all over the place), I should add that Miss Scott told me that amongst her Christian Lepcha community she notices a marked tendency for illegitimate children not to survive more than a very few months. If, however, this is due (as I imagine to be the case) to some form of infanticide—slow starvation, for instance, or general lack of care—it is one of the more unsatisfactory results of Mission influence, since members of the Church who give birth to illegitimate children are not looked upon with favour. Missionaries do a great deal of admirable work, but it is a great pity that the Church cannot see its way to compromise in the matters of polygyny and illegitimacy.

Contraception is not known amongst the Lepchas; nor does a woman take any action to induce a miscarriage when she knows that she is about to give birth to an illegitimate child: but in such circumstances should she miscarry she will say *nothing* about it.

If she refuses her consent he gives merely the *Soo* payment, and the matter is closed: but if she is willing, as seems to be commonly the case, he may take the girl into his home as an additional wife.

No stigma attaches to the mother of a bastard and she is able to contract a normal marriage in due course. In view of the fact that so many women in Jongu are sterile, she may even be sought after and may get a richer husband than would otherwise have been the case; but the child will generally be left with its mother's parents.

When an illegitimate child is born its father will go secretly to a Lama to find out what its name is to be; but if the father refuses to acknowledge it, then the mother's father will make the necessary visit, since a Lama will not himself go to a house for the purpose of naming an illegitimate child. Apart from this minor matter, the usual third-day festivities will be carried out exactly as for a child born in wedlock.

When a father refuses to acknowledge paternity a small ceremony is carried out before the child is born. A tree is pointed out as representing the child's father, and a small bamboo sliver, meant to represent his penis, is stuck into the base of it. This is then spat upon in a contemptuous fashion, after which the tree is addressed in an insulting voice and told that it is the father of the child. It is thought that when the child is born the tree will wither.

One curious case in connection with illegitimacy may be mentioned in passing. There is in Lingtem a certain family of which several members have died of leprosy. The nephew of the present head of the family, whose father died of this disease, is said by his uncle to be a bastard. This, however, is thought by the rest of the village to be a pure fiction, and it is said that he has made the boy an "honorary" bastard, so to speak, to clear him from the hereditary taint of leprosy. This will do away with the difficulty, which might otherwise ensue, of finding him a wife, when the time comes for him to marry.

Most people seem to think that it is desirable for the first-

- 842 born to be a girl, as in this case she can look after subsequent children and relieve her mother. Apart from this, there seems a slight preference for boys; for, in addition to the help they are able to give in the fields, it means that there is someone to look after the parents when they are too old to work for [59] themselves, whereas girls leave home on marriage, except in very rare circumstances.

855 Once a child is big enough to look after itself—that is when [59] it reaches the age of four or five—it is left more or less to its own devices; and unless a boy is to become a Lama he receives no formal training such as is given to the ordinary [87] European child. Nor is a girl taught how to cook, but by watching her mother and doing odd jobs about the house she gradually acquires the necessary skill. Little girls are fond of playing at making toy houses and it is a common sight to see them pretending to cook with leaves and mud, [52] but I never saw a girl playing with a doll and was told that they are unknown.

Small boys seem to spend most of their time wandering about with a pellet-bow; and stilt-walking is a popular [53] amusement. Most boys also play the flute, which is merely a length of thin bamboo with five holes for stops.

593 Most people are of the opinion that the ideal family consists of from three to four girls and from four to five boys. If there are too many boys there will not, unless the family is very rich, be enough to feed them all when they grow up and marry. As a matter of fact, the average family in Lingtem is extremely small, and a number of couples are childless. Since the average number of children does not give an indication of the true state of affairs, I have given the composition of each of the families in Talung in Appendix 1, 593 to which the reader is referred. It will be noted that a very 842 high proportion of the women appear to be sterile, a matter which causes great concern to the people themselves, who realise that their numbers are steadily dwindling, and who desire children above all things. This question of sterility is perhaps the greatest problem with which the Lepchas 1 [See cat. II, p. 301—Analysis]

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of Jongu have to deal. The reasons for it are not at all clear, but are possibly not unconnected with the people's sexual regulations, which will be discussed in detail later.

Nearly every ceremony and invocation ends with a request to be given children, and I well remember the last time we visited the Mandal's house. The ceremony I have already described had just been completed and he was escorting us up the path. We thanked him for his hospitality and told him that now that he had done the ceremony we were sure he would quickly recover his health. He smiled; and then suddenly became very serious. "If you really wish to give me a blessing," he said, "please pray that I may have a son. You could wish me nothing better than this: but I fear this boon will never be granted me."

Sterile couples sometimes make a pilgrimage to a monastery in order to be blessed by three Lamas. This is called *Mun lop-thop*. Many people have done it, but without result, and its efficacy is nowadays somewhat doubted. Better than this is to go to Luksom Partam, a tarn high up in the mountains, where the first birth of the human race is said to have occurred. On arrival at the place the husband and wife must copulate near the lake and offer a sacrifice on its banks; silver and precious stones should also be cast into the lake, if possible. On return to their home a Lama is called in to read the holy books and to offer grain and butter to the gods. In order to be effective the pilgrimage must be repeated in three successive years; but some people do it year after year in the hope of eventually getting a child. Of almost equal value is a ceremonial visit to the Talung Monastery. This is known as *Shaptok klong*. It consists in taking large quantities of *chi*, and rice, also the carcass of a pig, and offering them to the Lamas. It is said that the necessary gifts take at least ten men to carry them. On return from Talung the same Lama ceremony is performed as is necessary on return from Luksom Partam.

864 In the same way that a boy usually has his first sexual
 833 experience with a woman years older than himself, so is a girl
 ● 842 generally first seduced by some older man. A number of
 women told us that they started their sexual life at the age of
 ten; and in every case they had their first experience with a
 grown man. The people do not see anything offensive in
 this; and we were unable to convince them that the custom
 is undoubtedly one of the chief causes of the very high rate of
 sterility among the Jongu women. Nothing short of a
 complete examination by a gynæcologist would definitely
 establish this point; but it is significant that the several
 sterile women with whom we were on sufficiently intimate
 terms to discuss the subject all owned to having been
 initiated into sex at a very early age, and by men years older
 than themselves.

833 Except when a young boy is seduced by some elder
 relation a woman never makes the suggestion to copulate,
 although she may hint indirectly that she is not unwilling to
 submit. When a youth is interested in any particular girl he
 will generally have his first encounter with her out in the
 forest, or in some other secluded spot; but once relations
 between the two have been established it is usual for him to
 visit her at home. He will, if necessary, travel several miles in
 the dead of night for this purpose. The girl will previously
 explain the topography of the house to her lover and describe
 to him the exact place where she sleeps, so that when the time
 comes he may enter the house silently and make straight for
 her bed. He will usually creep in on all fours, stepping over
 the other sleeping people carefully, so as not to wake them.
 Should he be discovered he will at once run out of the house,
 and will not return that night; but if the pair are not disturbed
 it will generally be about two in the morning before the boy
 takes his departure. He will generally not leave his own
 home until everyone is asleep, so that he can depart un-
 noticed. Should the parents of the girl get to know what is
 happening they will not usually be angry or display any other
 emotion. Tafoor said that he would not mind in the least if he

knew that his daughter (now aged twelve) was having⁸³³ relations with a man; but he would not like her to give birth to a bastard, on account of the possible harm to the crops. Neither he nor his wife has spoken to her on the subject, nor is this ever done. Incidentally, it may be noted that the swelling of a young girl's breasts is not thought to be a sign of⁸²⁷ puberty, for which there is indeed no special name, but⁸⁸¹ an indication that she has commenced to have sexual relations.

Masturbation is not, of course, unknown, but is seldom⁸³⁹ indulged in by reason of the fact that women are available from the earliest moment that a boy feels the need of sex. The general opinion is that it is slightly silly and rather funny.

The average married Lepcha has sexual relations with his⁸³³ wife at least once every night, but abstinence is thought to cause no harm, and indeed makes one fat and healthy. It should be noted, however, that abstinence is interpreted as meaning having sexual relations only once in every three or four days. Tafor now considers himself a very continent man, but says that when he first married he usually copulated with his wife seven or eight times every night. In his opinion men are not much interested in the sexual act after the age of sixty or sixty-five; but women continue to take pleasure in the operation up to the time they die. The menopause seems to⁸⁸⁶ be hardly recognised and certainly does not result in any sort of psychological disturbance such as seems to be common among European women. It is realised that after a certain age women cease to conceive, but there is no break in their sexual activities. It may be that because of this no attempt is made to restrain the sex life of the young; for since there is no break in the sex life of the parents the question of jealousy, once again, does not arise, as I believe it does in our own civilisation. But this is a matter for the psychologists to decide.

Contraception is unknown; nor are aphrodisiacs in general⁸³² use. It is said, however, that the flesh of a bird called *Ken fo*,^[842] ●

832 which I have been unable to identify, is said to have a somewhat stimulating effect, and chameleon flesh serves the same purpose. These creatures normally live in trees, but are in the habit of drinking out of wells. If a man drinks water into which they have urinated he is liable to suffer from priapism, and a woman may become a nymphomaniac; but if the actual flesh of the animal is eaten this has a much stronger effect. The flesh of the male animal creates desire; that of the female takes it away. Chameleons are not found in Jongu, but Tafoor says he has seen them exposed for sale in Gangtok. He first heard about their use from old people who had been down to the plains and fought in the Bhutan war: they are not much used in Jongu.

834 It is usual for a man to have no sexual intercourse with his wife during the menstrual period; not, however, for reasons of hygiene, but because it is thought that he may become senseless for a week or so. It is said, though, that women • [842] become very amorous at this time, as a result of which intercourse indulged in immediately after the cessation of the menses usually results in conception. This idea is also very common among the Nepalese, who, however, unlike the Lepchas, believe that conception cannot take place at any other time.

843 It is not considered that child-bearing has any particular effect upon a woman: it does not age her in any way, nor does it impair her strength or looks. On the other hand it is not thought harmful if a woman never has a child. During the months of pregnancy the father is liable to get a little thin, and both parents may suffer from a state known as *thum doat*, which appears to be a state of loss of appetite. Both these states, however, are merely due to anxiety and not to any supernatural or other influence.

According to Lepcha ideas the first part of the foetus to be formed is the head: this takes about one month, and is followed by the remaining parts downward, the feet appearing last of all. The baby is thought to be completely formed after five months, when it also acquires a separate soul of its

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of course, in addition to the actual cash contributed by the 431 guests at the *Ong kay* already described.

There is a modified form of betrothal ceremony known 584 as *Ah-kut*, which is done by people who cannot afford the 574 full *Ashyek* payments. It consists in the presentation of one 585 pig's carcass to the bride's parents. No one would willingly be married by means of *Ah-kut*, which may be compared with our marriage by Registrar, if he could possibly afford to carry out the full ceremony, for it is a point of honour with Lepchas to entertain one's friends to the full limit of one's purse; and a failure to do so, should funds be available, would be to stamp oneself as a mean fellow and a bad co-operator. *Ah-kut*, however, constitutes full legal marriage, and no further ceremony is necessary.

Except for the additional wives a man may acquire by 595 inheritance Lepchas do not normally marry a second wife [642] unless the first proves to be childless. The custom of marry- [177] ing additional wives would appear to be an importation, probably through contact with Nepalis, for the language [192] does not contain any specific word to denote a second wife, the Nepali word *Kanchi* being commonly used for this purpose. I am, of course, aware that it is dangerous to base an hypothesis of this sort on linguistic evidence alone; but it is significant that in other parts of Sikkim and adjacent British [184] India Lepchas are monogamous except for the additional wives some acquire by inheritance.

In Jongu it appears that a childless woman nearly always induces her husband to marry again. If possible he will take one of his first wife's sisters, or possibly a niece; but in any case he should try and obtain some sort of relative of his wife, since this arrangement is thought to cause less domestic friction than might otherwise be the case. It sometimes 595 happens, however, that a man decides to remarry without 431 reference to his first wife (as in the case of Aga, for instance), in which case the new wife must give a present, known as *Thim seut*. It does not take any special form. The new wife should also give something to the eldest child of the first wife.

CHAPTER 14

A LETTER TO THE MAHARAJA OF SIKKIM

000 YOUR HIGHNESS,

You asked me to let you know what I thought about the Lepchas when I got back from Jongu; and the following notes are in amplification of the talk we had in Gangtok last August. If I have been somewhat outspoken in my criticisms I know you will forgive me because, like Your Highness, I, too, find these a very attractive and lovable people; and any suggestions I have to make are only offered with a view to helping them.

The most important thing is, I think, to discover why they are so rapidly dying out. You yourself told me that it is very generally believed in Sikkim that the extremely high rate of sterility among the Lepchas is due to the practice of several brothers sharing a wife. It may be that this has some bearing on the matter, but there is no scientific evidence to support such a theory. Nor, I think, would any modern biologist agree that constant intermarriage for several generations within a small group results in sterility. In refutation of this theory I need only instance the Gurkhas (some tribes of which practise cross-cousin marriage as a regular custom), who are, as you are well aware, extremely prolific. But, in any case, the Lepchas in Jongu do not permit cross-cousin marriage; nor, indeed, do they marry relatives of any sort, except those so distant as to be no relatives at all. I think that the custom of very young girls cohabiting with grown men undoubtedly causes a certain amount of sterility, but it is insufficient by itself to account for the very low birth-rate in Jongu. It is, I think, fairly obvious that some of the men, too, are sterile; but this again is only a minor factor.